

A Case Study of College Level Second Language Teachers' Perceptions and Implementations of Communicative Language Teaching

Chiu-Yin Wong
Monmouth University

Abstract

Previous research studies have indicated that some educators do not advocate Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) because of their misunderstanding of the methodology. This article explores the relationship between college-level second language (L2) educators' perceptions and their implementations of CLT. The results of this study show that the majority of the participating teachers admitted that they did not understand what exactly CLT meant, but agreed that a communicative approach could facilitate students' learning. These teachers would like to insert a variety of methods in their practices regardless of the rules provided by the program coordinators. The findings also indicate that some teachers advocate for CLT because they believe it is the best way to achieve communicative competence. This study suggests the importance of partnerships between program coordinators and instructors. It also aims to yield insight regarding the design of future language teacher education.

Introduction

Second language (L2) educators have paid a great deal of attention to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the last two decades. CLT is a term that refers to various approaches and methods for teaching a second language (L2) communicatively. The main purpose of CLT is to develop learners' communication skills and ability. Despite the importance of communication in teaching, Richards (2006) points out that a great deal of language teachers who believe they use CLT do not have a consistent definition of what it means. When asked what makes their classes communicative, some teachers state it is because they focus on developing students' speaking ability (Wu, 2008). Wu also indicates that some teachers do not advocate for CLT because of their misunderstanding of what it is. These teachers think that CLT will hinder students' development of the language process because it focuses on meaning only. The focus of this research study is to address a void in the literature by understanding language teachers' perceptions of CLT and investigating whether and how language teachers implement CLT in their teaching practices.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

CLT is an approach to teaching because it is "a unified but broadly based theoretical position about the nature of language and of language learning and teaching" (Brown, 2007, p. 241). The methodology was developed in different stages, and the ideas of CLT have been expanded since the mid-1970s.

Descriptions of CLT emphasize elements of communication, including negotiation of meaning, expression, and interpretation as the defining characteristic of CLT (Brown, 2000; Ellis, 1982; Johnson & Johnson, 1988; Lee & VanPatten, 2003; Littlewood, 1981; Nunan, 1991; Richard-Amato, 1996; Savignon, 1997). Lee and VanPatten (2003) explain that speaking is not the only skill that CLT focuses on. It also involves reading, writing, grammar, and culture. Brown (2007) adds that students in a CLT classroom need to use the target language in meaningful contexts. The purpose of CLT is to improve the learners' knowledge of the L2, as well as how to use it appropriately in a given social context (Li & Song, 2007). CLT is different from traditional teaching methods in that learners acquire a L2 through interaction with others rather than rote memorization and grammar rule learning. Despite the principles and the characteristics of CLT provided in the literature, some scholars criticize the definitions of CLT as very broad. CLT raises concerns because there is a great deal of confusion and controversy, and a lack of research on applying CLT in a language classroom (Canale, 1983). For example, Nattinger (1984) notes that there are some general descriptions of CLT, but its definitions are vague and contain many variations. Many L2 teachers feel frustrated due to the ambiguous explanations (Savignon, 1990), and many language teachers who claim to use CLT do not have a consistent definition. Unfortunately, there is still not enough guidance for teachers to use CLT in L2 classrooms (Burke, 2007).

The Role of Teachers in Communicative Language Teaching

The role of teachers in CLT is different from that of the traditional language classroom in which the focus is on grammar and translation. CLT creates a learner-centered classroom environment of social learning where teachers provide opportunities for students, rather than taking an authoritative role and having power over their learning (Richards, 2006). CLT teachers have three major roles. The first role is to serve as facilitators to guide students' learning and communication and to provide more opportunities for students to interact by creating meaningful activities (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The second role of CLT teachers is to become participants with students within an activity instead of trying to control the activities (Littlewood, 2004; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The third role is to serve as a coach to guide students' learning.

Littlewood (2004) reminds CLT teachers that although they do not dominate students' activities, they do not totally stay out of students' communication. Rather, teachers in CLT classrooms provide guidance, observe students' strengths and weaknesses, and participate in the interaction with students. With teachers' guidance, students in CLT classrooms learn the target language by means of interaction and eventually develop their own language skills. Therefore, CLT "allows students to personalize learning by applying what they have learned to their own lives" (Richard, 2006, p. 23). Despite the attention given to CLT in the literature, language teachers have not received enough training on applying such methodology from their teaching programs (Savignon, 2002) because the term lacks precise definitions (Brown, 2007).

Teachers' Perception of Communicative Language Teaching

The understanding and interpretation of CLT varies among teachers and scholars (Saengboon, 2006; Thompson, 1996; VanPatten, 1998). For example, Thompson (1996) states that CLT means focusing on speaking only and not on paying attention to grammar. Likewise, VanPatten (1998) found in his study about the perspectives among educators concerning the term "communicative" that CLT means speaking to most teachers, whereas researchers believe that CLT means teaching for both speaking and

writing. Other concerns about CLT include teachers and students' perceptions of this language teaching methodology and its effectiveness on second language acquisition (SLA) (e.g., Rao, 2002). It is important to examine teachers' perceptions on CLT, because these perceptions of teaching are translated into classroom practices (Johnson, 1984).

Mangubhai, Dashwood, Berthold, Flores, and Dale (1998) compared teachers' understandings and perceptions of CLT. The subjects in this study were 37 elementary school language teachers in Australia. The results of the study showed that more than half of the participants viewed group work as potentially promoting more interaction among students. At the same time, they viewed such strategies as not effective in a real classroom environment. As for the role of error correction and grammar, more than half of the teachers believed that error correction was necessary in language teaching and that the majority of the participants viewed teaching of grammar as important. A majority of the participants believed that the role of teachers was to pass the knowledge to the students, and some thought that it was impossible for students to reach autonomy. Mangubhai et al. concluded that language teachers' perceptions and understanding were not in accordance with the research on CLT.

In another study, Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood, and Son (2005) compared six elementary school L2 teachers on their conception of CLT. Based on Joyce and Weil's (1992) framework that assists teachers in familiarizing themselves with a teaching approach and on the features of CLT shown in the literature, the authors prepared a list of attributes to evaluate teachers' conceptions of CLT by using semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. All participants were videotaped in their class using CLT for a recall during the interviews. The participants' responses regarding their CLT conceptions in the interviews and on the questionnaire indicated mixed results. The responses in the interviews were different from the descriptions in the literature, whereas those on the questionnaire were similar to the literature.

Mangubhai et al. argued that the differences in the participants' responses could possibly be because the teachers had a hard time expressing their thoughts in the interviews. Also, they argued that the teachers' responses on the questionnaire were similar to those of the literature because the teachers' abstract concepts of CLT belonged to its respective reading and training, while the differences were from their actual classroom experience. Mangubhai et al. stated that when implementing CLT, the teachers integrated other general teaching variables from their teaching experiences. However, the participants objected to the view that focusing on meaning alone can promote grammatical competence.

Research on Teachers' Classroom Practices with Communicative Language Teaching

Research has shown that CLT classroom practice is rare. A body of research (Burns, 1990; Guthrie, 1984; Kamaravadivelu, 1993; Long and Sato, 1983; Mitchell, 1998; Nunan, 1987; Walz, 1989) provided evidence that teachers seemed to advocate for CLT, but they did not implement communicative approaches in their teaching. Researchers (e.g., Huang, 2007; Nunan, 1987) have also pointed out that teachers integrate traditional methods in their communicative activities. Nunan (1987) observed five CLT lessons. The teachers in these classes used interaction activities as those suggested in the literature. However, in Nunan's analysis of the data, he found that such activities used by the teachers included many traditional teaching patterns, such as drills, and the teachers were not genuinely interested in the students' answers.

Besides looking purely at how teachers implemented communicative teaching in their classrooms, some studies (e.g., Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Sato, 2002) have investigated both

teachers' attitudes toward CLT and how they carried out communicative approaches and methods. In Sato and Kleinsasser's (1999) study, they investigated L2 teachers' perceptions of CLT, how they developed their beliefs, as well as how they conducted their lessons. The subjects were 10 public school teachers teaching Japanese as a L2.

The data indicated that the 10 participants thought that CLT is a very broad concept. The researchers also reported that the participants in their study claimed that they use CLT in their teaching. However, the observation data did not provide such evidence. In addition, the data from the survey indicated that the teachers used both CLT and traditional teaching. Sato and Kleinsasser reported that there was a difference between these teachers' perceptions of CLT and their practice. Although the teachers believed that CLT focuses on communication as well as on speaking and listening in the L2, and that it involves little grammar but many activities, these teachers did not practice these beliefs. The teachers claimed that they did not have time to prepare activities and could not forego grammar instruction.

In addition, Sato (2002) investigated Japanese high school English teachers' understanding of CLT and how they taught their lessons communicatively. The results indicated that a significant amount of instruction by these teachers was on grammar teaching and translation. The data also showed that these teachers refused to implement CLT in their teaching because they lacked support for their own learning of teaching communicatively. Thus, Sato suggested that CLT teachers need not only support from administrators, but they also need continued education about how to implement CLT. The above studies provide evidence that there are differences between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices concerning CLT.

The Present Study

The following two understandings of the research on CLT led to the present study. Many teachers develop an idea of what CLT is from their teacher training programs or research studies, but their implementation of communicative teaching is different from their understanding. Some language teachers are not sure how they can apply CLT in their classroom practices because its definition is rather broad compared to other traditional teaching techniques, such as the Audiolingual and Grammar Translation methods. As such, the focus of this research study is to address a void in the literature by understanding college level L2 teachers' perceptions of CLT and investigating whether and how they implement CLT in their teaching practices. I chose the qualitative paradigm because it provides us a way to investigate a phenomenon with details about an individual's experience and knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are college level second language teachers' perceptions of communicative language teaching?
2. Do these language teachers implement communicative language teaching in their classroom practices, and if so, how?

Method

Participants

The participants involved in this study were six instructors (three males and three females) who were teaching beginning or intermediate levels of Spanish at a university in the Southern United States.

These participant teachers were also pursuing their Master's or doctoral degrees in Applied Linguistics or Spanish. They were taking or had taken a L2 methods course at the time of the study. The methods course provided an introduction to L2 pedagogy with an emphasis on communicative methods. The Spanish department required all instructors in their classrooms to employ a CLT approach and to exclude explicit grammar explanation. Among the participants, four were native speakers of Spanish and two were non-native speakers. Their teaching experience ranged from one semester to five years. Throughout the study, the participants were called Anita, Cesar, Gala, Juan, Rio, and Tere (all pseudonyms).

Data Collection

Observations. To minimize research bias, the data were triangulated by conducting non-participant observations, interviews, and collecting a variety of documents and records. Six classroom observations were conducted for each participant (starting in the middle of Fall semester, 2009 and continuing in the Spring semester, 2010) to capture in detail how the instructors carried out CLT, how they taught the language in their CLT classrooms, how students responded to their teaching, if the instructors employed other teaching techniques, and if so, how the teachers used these techniques. An important aspect of observation is that it gives the researcher in-depth information about what is happening in the environment, and provides a way to capture behaviors and emotions of the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Non-participant observations were chosen over participant observations because the program coordinator required the researcher to "act as a fly on the wall" during observations. The researcher also took field notes with thick descriptions during these observations. Rossman and Rallis (2003) note that thick descriptions offer details and rich data. The field notes included what was happening in the class, the teachers' behaviors, the students' responses, as well as questions and thoughts that came up during the observations.

Interviews. To obtain information about the participants' experiences and the meaning they make out of these experiences, the three-step interview process suggested by Seidman (1998) was adopted. The questions the researcher asked in the first interview with the participants were about their experience as language learners and teachers, whereas in the second interview, the researcher concentrated on asking the participants what they thought about CLT. In the third interview, the questions were related to the observations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted because they would provide the researcher with the most appropriate data. As Corbin and Morse (2003) describe, the researcher is in control of the interview because he or she designs the structure and order of the interview through asking structural questions, whereas the informants have control over how much information they want to reveal when answering the questions. The researcher added questions on top of the predetermined questions for more information and clarification, because questions and concerns from the observations arose (Berg, 2004).

Document and record. The researcher also relied on documents and records in this study. Merriam (1998) emphasizes that the purpose of gathering documents and records is to examine the phenomenon and participants in detail. The textbook used in the participants' classes was *¿Sabías que...?* written by VanPatten, Lee, Ballman, and Farley (2008). The authors of the book emphasized communication. The book also focuses on the five Cs of the Standards for Foreign Language Learning: communication, cultures, connections to the students' knowledge in other fields, comparisons of grammar and vocabulary of other Spanish dialects, and language used in the community. For the purpose of this

study, syllabi, copies of the textbook, and handouts from each participant were collected. The syllabi listed class goals and objectives that reflected the values of the instructors or the department about second L2 teaching. This source of information was analyzed and compared with the participants' actual teaching from the observations and responses from the interviews. The textbook the participants used and the information on the syllabi provided a significant amount of data about whether the class leaned toward traditional teaching or a communicative approach.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, both ongoing analysis (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) and recursive analysis method (Merriam, 1998) were employed. The researcher analyzed the data through repeatedly reading the data. In addition, throughout the analysis process, the researcher referred to the data from the observations and documents collected to better know what to ask in the interviews. Rossman and Rallis (2003) suggest several strategies to establish categories and themes. To look for evidence for categories and themes, the coding method was used (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). To code the data, the open coding strategy recommended by Rossman and Rallis (2003) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) was utilized to establish final concrete categories and emerge themes with appropriate codes from the data.

Results

Two major themes were found: perceptions of CLT and activities used in CLT. Sub-themes for each major theme were also determined. Table 1 provides the definitions of each sub-theme. In hopes of providing convincing and in-depth understanding of the findings, I presented the major findings in a narrative format, supported by information from the interview transcripts and field notes from the observations.

Table 1

Definitions of Themes and Sub-themes

Findings of Major Themes and Sub-themes and Their Definitions
1) Perceptions of CLT
• Conceptions of CLT <i>Teachers' understanding of what CLT is and what it means to them</i>
• Feelings toward CLT <i>Teachers' attitudes and feelings about using CLT</i>
2) Activities Used in CLT
• Types of Activities <i>The kinds of activities that teachers use in their CLT classrooms</i>
• Criteria of selecting activities <i>Teachers' criteria of choosing activities for their CLT classrooms</i>

Perceptions of CLT

Conceptions of CLT. The participating teachers have divergent conceptions of what CLT means. Most of them believe that oral ability is the major goal of CLT, whereas a few teachers understand that communication refers to the focus of the four skills. Several teachers admit that they are not completely certain about what CLT is because of inexperience of the methodology. The teachers' belief that CLT focuses on speaking only can be shown from the examples below.

Anita: I would describe [CLT] as a teaching approach with focus on oral communication more than anything else. That's why we have so much emphasis on speaking in group activities that force them to produce and speak.

Tere: I would say that [CLT] is like to carry out...like as a teacher, as an instructor to carry out, to design activities in order to possibly take [students] to start developing their oral skills.

Other teachers perceive that CLT includes not only speaking, but also writing and grammar. For example, Gala described her understanding of CLT as:

Gala: I guess the objective of teaching is for students to do something with the language: communicate, speak, write, read. I don't think communicative language teaching means that there is no focus on grammar. Reading and writing can also be communicative. And I think sometimes, under the word 'communicative', people think about speaking. But it's not...communicative doesn't mean just speaking ability. It can involve...it should involve, in my opinion, the four skills.

A few teachers admit that they are not certain about what CLT is, and they describe the methodology based on their reading as well as what they can and cannot do in the classroom. Their reasons include lacking training and experience in the area. The expressions below describe the teachers' uncertainty of what CLT means.

Juan: I am not sure. I think it's supposed to be... I didn't study all this stuff. A lot of communicative skills, communicative activities, basically make students talk a lot. You know, we don't focus on grammar when we teach.

Cesar: I am not an expert in this... the expression is communicative method, and the scientific name, the communicative language teaching method would be structured input.

Feelings toward CLT. The teachers have various attitudes and feelings toward CLT. Each participating teacher agrees that there are merits about this methodology. While two teachers are in strong favor of CLT and they believe that it is the best way to learn a L2, other teachers disagree with such a belief. The following descriptions show why the teachers think CLT is the best way to learn a L2.

Rio: It's the best so far.... Emotionally communicative approach means a lot of fulfillment to me as a teacher. Because having taught under the grammar approach before, I know how frustrating it can be to the students and to the teacher because you can get straight-A students knowing all the grammar rules, but in the end they are unable to speak the language. And that is very frustrating to them. Then again, you have base low retention rates whenever you use a grammar-based approach—they may be able to regurgitate everything on the texts so to speak. Then two weeks later they forget it. And that's just sad. But now using this approach, they actually are able to communicate, and they are really excited about that.

Anita: I think it's very useful. Because when students graduate, if we focus on their communicative abilities, we can actually teach them something useful, and they can communicate instead of just memorizing a bunch of grammar things ... and they won't be able to speak with other people. So I think it's really good.

Although the teachers think CLT has its merits, they agree that students need a variety of methods to learn a L2 effectively. The excerpts below portray this belief.

Cesar: There are 20, 21 students and you can't expect using one theory or just one way of teaching and think all of them, 20 or 21 students, will either appreciate it or totally benefit 100% from the techniques you are using. So I prefer to use many different techniques.

The teachers also mentioned how they feel about CLT from an instructor's point of view. Three of them believe that it is an effective way for student to learn, but it is rather difficult for teachers to create a CLT lesson. For example,

Anita: I like [CLT] and I don't. I like it because I think it's good for the students, but it makes it a little harder for the teachers to create lessons that are actually communicative.

The teachers show mixed feelings for CLT. While all of them believe that CLT is an effective way to learn and teach an L2, some of these teachers prefer using a variety of methods in addition to CLT. A few teachers admit that CLT is beneficial in students' L2 learning process, but it requires a great deal of preparation for teachers. The participants' understanding of CLT varies. The main difference is about whether CLT focuses on only speaking or other aspects of the language. The teachers' inexperience in implementing CLT appears to play into feelings of uncertainty in the methodology. They also have various attitudes and feelings toward CLT. All of the participants believe that CLT has its strong points, but some of them are opposed to the notion that CLT independently is the best way to teach an L2.

Activities Used in CLT

All of the teachers used structured input activities in their classes because the required textbook is written based on the structured input model. The teachers were obligated to cover a certain amount of activities in each chapter. They had the freedom to decide how they wanted to arrange the order of the

activities and modify them accordingly. After they covered the required activities, the teachers had a choice to provide supplementary activities. According to the observations, the activities teachers used were different. While all of the participants followed closely to the activities in the textbook, most of them incorporated their own activities and modified the ones from the textbook. The sub-themes that were evident from this theme are types of activities and criteria of selecting activities.

Types of activities. In addition to conducting structured input activities from the textbook, all of the participants incorporated various types of activities in their CLT classrooms to facilitate students' learning. The types of activities include lectures on grammar, grammar-based activities, and communicative activities, such as conversations and picture descriptions. Several teachers modified the activities from the textbook to fit the students' situations.

Two teachers focused more on grammar and brought in grammar-based activities. The following examples are from my observations in Cesar's classes. In my first observation in Cesar's class, he introduced the imperfect and preterit tenses in the form of lectures. He also used technical terms, such as *direct objects*, *indirect objects*, and *reflexive verbs*. When Cesar explained how direct objects and indirect objects are used in Spanish, he first wrote the explanation and formulas of these two forms on two different cards and passed them around to the class. In my third observation in Cesar's class, he gave a small lecture on possessive adjectives. He explained the differences between 'mi' (a possessive adjective) and 'me' (an indirect object or a reflexive), and other possessive adjectives. In addition to lectures on grammar and doing activities from the textbook, Cesar also had his students form small groups and write short stories with a focus on particular grammar features, such as imperfect and preterit tenses.

The type of activity that Juan used during my observations in his class is an example of a grammar-based activity. He provided a brief grammar explanation on the conditional form to the students and asked them to come up with sentences based on the form. In the fourth observation in Juan's class, he directed the students' attention to the conditions and use of verbs in Spanish by asking them to read the grammar description in the textbook. The book contains a grammar chart, explanation, and examples of how the conditional form is used. After that, Juan showed the students a formula for using the conditional form with verbs and irregular verbs. He then asked the class to do the structured input activity related to the conditional form in the textbook. When the students were finished, he asked them to form small groups and go to the corners of the blackboard where there were pictures of people: one person on each corner. The people included Tiger Woods, George Bush, and President Obama. In the fifth observation, Juan conducted a similar type of grammar-based activity after explaining about the use of subjunctive and conditional forms. He explained to the students how irregular verbs for subjunctive forms should be conjugated and asked them to do the structured input activity in the textbook.

A few teachers used authentic pictures and sample sentences to introduce new target forms and vocabulary before asking students to do the activities in the textbook. The following example from an observation in Rio's class displays this type of activity. Before having the students do a structured input activity on frequency words, Rio presented a number of pictures of famous people and sample sentences associated with the pictures. He also left the names of the famous people out and asked the students to fill in. For example, '_____ se acuesta tarde todas las noches' and '_____ goes to bed late every night.' After this introductory activity, Rio had his students do a series of activities from the book related to frequency words.

Instead of following closely to the structured input activities in the textbook, all of the participants mentioned that they would modify the activities from the book when needed. The following example is from an observation in Tere's class. It shows how she modified a structured input activity from the textbook. When reviewing the impersonal and passive forms of 'se', the textbook had three sub-activities about laws within one activity. After Tere asked her students to complete the first two sub-activities, she modified the last activity by having the students tell each other what rules they had at home, instead of having them create a prohibition that they would want to see converted into law, as indicated in the book.

Criteria of selecting activities for CLT. When expressing how they select activities for their CLT classrooms, the teachers had similar criteria. The activities these teachers chose reflected their perceptions of CLT. Their criteria are based on students' needs, knowledge in L2 learning theory, level of engagement, and usefulness of activities. The teachers include, omit, or modify activities according to the usefulness of the activities. Anita's belief of how she selects activities reflects the teachers' idea of incorporating activities based on students' needs. She takes into consideration what students need to perform at the end of the chapter. She said:

There is a task at the end of the chapter that they are supposed to be able to do. But the whole objective of a certain task is for them to be able to do certain tasks, so I take things out or leave things in... I think about what students are supposed to accomplish at the end of the chapter.... So I choose those activities that will help them with the skills to do that task.

Another principle of how the teachers create and choose appropriate activities for students is their knowledge in L2 learning theory, specifically about input and output. The excerpts below from Rio and Anita demonstrate this fact.

Rio: Most of the time I do make a point to follow from the less complicated to more complicated stuff, from input to output. I do try to follow those activities. Whenever I am in press time, I still make a point to go from input to output; from simple to more complex.

Anita: If we have two or three [tasks] working with input activities, and I don't have time, then I will choose two out of those three—or only one out of those three. But I try not to skip, to go straight from input to output. I would try to do some activities working with input.

When selecting activities, other participants focus on how well the activities can engage students' interests, learning, and participation. Juan and Gala's descriptions of how they decide which activities to include in their classrooms illustrate this criterion.

Juan: I look at [the activities] beforehand, and I see which ones me as a student would understand and get the most of it ... but also some that may not be as good but they will keep them engaged, like they will like it and that will be fun for them.

Gala: If [the activities] are repetitive, I'll try to omit them. For ones that are boring, I omit that. I try to get a mixture of activities that will get the students involved in the class in doing something rather than being passive. So, if there are a lot of passive activities where they're listening or checking off things, I'll make sure there's an activity where they actually have to do something with what they're saying.

The teachers' expectations for choosing activities for their CLT classrooms are similar. Their criteria take into consideration students' needs, knowledge in SLA theory, level of engagement, and usefulness of activities. All of the participants incorporated various types of activities in their CLT classrooms to facilitate students' learning. The types of activities include lectures on grammar, creating sentences based on contexts, and communicative activities. Two teachers focused more on grammar-related activities, and other teachers used authentic pictures and sample sentences to introduce new target forms and vocabulary. Several teachers modified the activities from the textbook to fit the students' situations.

Discussion

The participants in this study raved about CLT and agreed that it is useful in helping students develop communicative competence. All of them believe that CLT contains teaching values that facilitate students' communication in the target language. However, how the participants perceive CLT varied. Some seem to have a more thorough understanding of what it is than other participants. Similarly, some teachers tend to have a stronger feeling about CLT.

Misconceptions and CLT Practice

The findings revealed that some participants held misconceptions about CLT. Recall that the core idea of CLT is to allow students to participate in communication in order to achieve communicative competence through interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning (Savignon, 1983, 1997, 2002). CLT is not only designed to develop speaking skills, but also develop reading and writing. Additionally, grammar rules should not be eliminated in CLT. Instead of memorizing grammar rules, Savignon (1983, 1997, 2002) suggests that students should learn grammar with meaning to achieve communicative ability. However, half of the participants perceive CLT as emphasizing oral communication, and that grammar should not be the focus in a CLT classroom. A possible justification for such a misconception is derived by the word "communicative" from the name Communicative Language Teaching and the description of the term: the primary goal of CLT is to develop learners' communicative competence (Wu, 2008). Wu also points out that the reason teachers hold misunderstandings of CLT is due to various definitions and interpretations of the term since the 1970s. Others (e.g., Cai, 2009) have argued that misconceptions of CLT occur because teachers and scholars often characterize the methodology based on their own understanding. It is not surprising that the participants had different descriptions of CLT, which may have affected their perceptions of the methodology in language instruction.

Affective Memories and CLT Practice

Some participants strongly support the idea of employing CLT as a sole methodology in their classrooms, whereas other participants view it differently. The differences in perceptions can also be

explained through affective memories, which is a motivational component under a social cognitive expectancy-value model by Eccles (1983, 1987, 1993, 2005) and Wigfield (1994). Affective memories refer to humans' memories of former experiences related to a particular activity or task (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). If an individual had a negative experience about a certain activity, avoidance of the same type of activity will result. In the study, Rio, for example, had a negative L2 learning experience in the classroom because most of his learning involved studying and memorizing grammar rules. Rio's affective memories may explain his avoidance in explaining grammar to his students.

Perceptions and CLT Implementation

Overall, most of the participants' perceptions of CLT are aligned to their classroom implementations. Despite the fact that the administrators required them to follow certain rules, such as no English use and no grammar explanation in their CLT classrooms, not all of the participant teachers adhered closely to the rules because of their beliefs in teaching. The activities conducted by most of the participants reflected their perceptions of CLT. The activities chosen by the participants also reflected what they believe a CLT classroom should contain. As Isler and Cakiroglu (2009) suggest, teachers play a critical role in making final decisions as to how they conduct their lessons regardless of what the curriculum proposes. Teacher beliefs play a large part in this decision-making process. Yero (2002) indicates that teacher beliefs are powerful because they not only shape teachers' perceptions, but also highly impact instructors' classroom practices as well as other pedagogical behaviors. Research in the field of L2 education has found evidence that instructors' teaching practices and relevant decision making are informed by their beliefs and knowledge regarding L2 teaching and learning (e.g., Borg, 2003; Burns, 1992; Farrell, 1999; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Golombek, 1998; Ng & Farrell, 2003; Richards, Gallo, & Renandya, 2001; Yim, 1993).

Professional Development as a Catalyst for Shifting Perceptions

One factor that may have affected the participants' perceptions of CLT was the methods course that they were required to take. These teachers mentioned that the major focus of the course was on CLT and structured input. They were also encouraged by the department to use structured input and teach communicatively. Taken together, the participants received feedback from the students, instruction from the professor of the methods course, and weekly meetings with the program coordinators about the effectiveness of their teaching. With practice, feedback on the performance, and further instruction on their teaching behaviors, these teachers modified their teaching beliefs and styles. Pajares (1993) explains that educators continuously reshape their beliefs when they absorb new information from the environment, and they adjust their teaching based on the new information, including new knowledge regarding the content area, student performance, and feedback. He states that 'The process of accommodating new information and beliefs is gradual, one of taking initial steps, accepting and rejecting certain ideas, modifying existing beliefs, and finally adopting new beliefs' (p. 46). L2 teachers alter their beliefs about teaching as they gain more knowledge about language pedagogy, have more experience in teaching, receive students' responses, and observe their learning behaviors. Over time, teachers adjust their teaching methods.

Implications for Second Language Teacher Education

This study underscores previous research suggesting that it is important for L2 educators to understand instructors' beliefs in teaching and learning and what they discover from their instruction, which may have an impact on their teaching preferences. Bailey (1992), Hampton (1984), Jackson (1992), and Richards, Gallo, and Renandya (2001) offer evidence to suggest that teacher beliefs are the central component in teacher development as well as their instruction to students. Richards et al. (2001) state that it is essential to determine teacher beliefs to understand how teachers govern their instructional practices. A similar conclusion is identified in the study of Harste, Woodward, and Burk (1984). To understand teachers' beliefs in L2 teaching and learning, offering ongoing teacher training to teachers is necessary. A continuous professional development program can include workshops, periodic observations of other instructors, and seminars. Attending workshops and conducting observations allow teachers to explore and discover various ways of teaching. Through observing modeled activities, teachers can be more self-efficacious as a result of the observational learning experiences. Having seminars in which teachers reflect on their beliefs through discussions can help them and their trainers understand their pedagogical choices.

This study further emphasizes taking into account teachers' teaching experience and their interpretations of students' feedback and learning performance. Program coordinators and administrators can engage instructors in discussions about their pedagogical experiences, struggles, as well as what they observe from students' behaviors and performance. This allows them to further understand what the teachers are experiencing in their instructional process and offer support to the teachers. Besides providing training to teachers, encouraging them to try out innovations is important. Clark and Peterson (1986) point out that teachers who try out an innovation through which they witness progress in students learning will more likely modify their belief. Administrators should offer support and encouragement instead of limiting teachers' choice in teaching methodology.

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